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Approved For Release 2002/11/04 : CIA-RDP80-00630A000300160001-0
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SEMINAR REPORT

Seminar on NFAC Analytical Centers

Center for the Study of Intelligence
Central Intelligence Agency
Washington, D.C. 20505
2 October 1979

OO-2853

TR 79-100005

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Seminar on Analytical Centers

A group of agency professionals met recently to discuss the experience of the various analytical centers in the National Foreign Assessments Center. Nine in number, these centers differ from each other in many respects and, as was pointed out, a few are merely large divisions. The discussion began by focusing on the two regional analytical centers in the Office of Political Analysis - the Cuban Analytical Center and the Iranian Analytical Center. A great portion of the time was spent on these two, in part because they draw personnel from other NFAC offices and are thus somewhat more controversial, in part because they focus attention on the perennial question of functional versus regional organization of the NFAC. [redacted] a member of the Iranian Analytical Center, served as the rapporteur for the group. She is responsible for the summary below, which has not been reviewed by the participants. The Center for the Study of Intelligence, which organized the seminar, believes it to be an accurate rendition of the main points of the discussion.

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Seminar on NFAC Analytic Centers

CEN-TER, n (ME centre, fr MF, fr L centrum, fr GK kentron sharp point, center of a circle, fr kentein to prick). Most important or pivotal in relation to an indicated activity, interest, or condition; the source from which something emanates; an area of concentrated population; a point around which something revolves; a core; a place of concentrated activity or influence.

On 13 September a score of NFAC analysts and managers met, under the auspices of the Center for the Study of Intelligence, to discuss the role of the NFAC centers. Introductory remarks on each of the centers showed that they:

- Vary considerably in size and focus - from a five-person, single-country group to a multi-compartmented, functionally-organized basic intelligence entity with over ten times as many participants.
- Address single-country, personality, narcotics, strategic, military-economic, basic economic, natural resource, and methodological issues, as well as the intelligence business itself.
- In most cases include functional responsibilities for primary current intelligence production and research as well as consultation, coordination, and/or brokerage with other production offices within the Agency.
- Are, in several instances, composed of staff generally considered rotational and usually include a complement from at least one NFAC component other than the center's managing office.
- Have varying degrees of autonomy in their managing offices.
- Are, by their own assessments, successfully meeting their individual goals.

These analytic centers were created to cope with what some observers saw as either an "intelligence failure" or fragmented, shallow production or to meet the demands of an emerging geographic or functional problem of national interest. The effectiveness of the centers has generally been proportional to the limitation of their purview to an issue or country of continuing interest that can be isolated from functional world problems.

"Continuing interest" is a predominant factor in management's consideration of whether to respond to a situation with a task force (or series of them) or a center; "isolation," or the analytic containability of the problem, comes into play when management decides whether to respond by creating a center or by distributing new responsibilities within the existing NFAC structure. This choice is also strongly affected by questions of resource allocation.

A task force is designed to deal with a crisis situation, and is anticipated to be of relatively short duration. Its 24-hour, all-source response to consumer demands for current assessments burns analytic resources at such a high rate that relatively large numbers of personnel with little or no familiarity with the immediate issue driving the task force often move in and out of its duty roster. Moreover, a minimal effort is devoted to developing substantive expertise or to addressing non-current aspects of the problem. A center, on the other hand, is designed to bring a specified number of analysts together on one- to two-year rotations in a concentrated effort to produce a continuous flow of current and research studies of a variety, breadth and depth beyond that expected of any individual branch or group of branches working independently in various NFAC offices.

It is probably not possible to "isolate" completely any problem of national interest and, in fact, NFAC centers have not attempted to assume total responsibility for production on their individual topics. Studies of group dynamics show that stimulation falls off in groups of over ten persons, but resource availability rather than theory seems to govern NFAC center sizes. There has been consideration of giving some centers sole responsibility for all production on their topic, but space and personnel limitations have intervened. (Reference files, for example, cannot be easily relocated.) Moreover, such an arrangement could bury the center personnel under current and research requests peripheral to the main stream of the issue on which the center is focused. Rational utilization of staffs has therefore stimulated cooperation with other substantively interested NFAC offices and explicit or implicit

agreements with them on division of the analytic turf. Such arrangements, however, are vulnerable to misunderstandings that leave important aspects of an issue uncovered when the center and related offices each believe the other has agreed to accept responsibility for those issues. Bureaucratic "turf," moreover, still perpetuates overlapping coverage of "hot" issues. NFAC presently has centers in more than one managing office that deal with similar aspects of a problem; relations between these centers have not been worked out in detail, nor has competition between NFAC centers and branches working on the same issue been eliminated. Close communications on a continuing basis with analysts in other offices are, consequently, essential.

Both costs and benefits--which may not be shared equally by the offices involved--are derived from the "co-location" of specialists in the NFAC centers. Like task forces, the centers are heavy resource consumers, but at a lower rate. Nevertheless, if management chooses to concentrate its analytic experts in a center, it may not be able to avoid "losing" to the center a person who had also been an office's expert on other topics as well, leaving the parent office understaffed, especially if events require formation of another center or a task force on a related issue. Perhaps worse, a center member may be required to cover issues in addition to those involved in the center. In other cases, analysts have been associated with centers but are not detailed full time to their staff. Centers further consume resources through their superior ability to task service components. This puts a burden in volume of requests on those offices whether or not they have contributed to the center's staff, and the broadening of analytic horizons in a well-run center may also generate tasking more sophisticated than the support office is capable of handling with existing resources.

The limited number of analysts available for center staffs in some NFAC offices--as well as in the State and Defense Departments--often tends to preclude their participation in NFAC centers desiring their expertise and separate viewpoints. The absence of other agencies' personnel has, however, facilitated the development of unusually candid relationships between some NFAC centers and their DDO counterparts. This openness is also facilitated by the sharing and passing on to their successors of the mutual contacts established among groups of specialists in the center and on the DDO desk.

Central to the effective management of the center is management's choice of the center chief, its individual members, and its relationship to its managing office. The mix of

personalities, grade levels, their competence and experience, and the internal operating rules and lines of subordination will make or break the center. Center demands for flexible or shared areas of responsibility and for analytic give-and-take among its staff in producing joint products underline the importance of team skills for effective center staff members. The nature of the center leaves little room for the domineering or the very creative but individualistic analyst; one misfit could throw an otherwise sound center off the track. On the other hand, overemphasis on teamwork may result in "group-think" in which team players allow good but apparently speculative or controversial ideas to die.

The center chief is the key to achieving the proper balance of shared responsibility versus individual effort and avoiding both "group-think" and individualism or compartmentation in the center staff. Staff members, the chief, the managing office, NFAC management, and consumers all have varying degrees of responsibility in ensuring that the center does not focus so exclusively on the most "saleable" current and research aspects of its responsibilities that controversial views, reasoned speculation, and background research on less immediately interesting topics are excluded. At the same time, the center chief and/or the managing office need the authority to shield the center staff by reviewing and accepting or rejecting consumer requests. Such decisions follow from their determination--however general--of which consumers the center is intended to serve.

By its nature the center should draw the best available analysts, but once in the center they may occupy a career limbo, particularly those detailed from an NFAC office other than the center's managing office. NFAC centers generally carry an air of impermanence and of being outside the established chain of command and the ladder of success. The center's grade structure, by virtue of its ad hoc nature and restricted size, may lack the flexibility to permit any promotions. From the viewpoint of contributing offices, an analyst on rotational assignment may not be developing skills or producing products valuable to the home office and, hence, of importance to the individual's career advancement. To the center's managing office, the center may seem like a rogue answering to the front office or to the NIO and outside of its own production and personnel development plans.

One of the stated goals of the NFAC center is the development of "total" analysts who will return to their parent offices with broader--i.e. interdisciplinary--views and skills. When center staff members see themselves as specialists in the whole

topic addressed by the center rather than functional experts detailed by their parent office, all staff members are able to contribute to or handle any query, whether it is primarily political, economic, or military in focus. This not only produces a better response but also reduces the pressures on the staff created by a temporary absence of its "expert" on an individual issue. The views of the center's managing office and the center chief are important because they facilitate this attitude among the staff and lead to equal treatment for all center members. The view of the parent office(s) of center analysts detailed from other NFAC offices is important in terms not only of the career development of the individual analysts, but also of the attitude it assumes toward coordination of center products focusing on its functional responsibilities. The substantive review process among the center, its managing office, the parent offices of center staff members, and other NFAC offices often still falls into that unresolved and constantly shifting gray area of "turf" consciousness.

At the end of the seminar session, after several participants had to leave, one participant commented that NFAC may not be committed to the idea that the centers should really strive toward developing "total" analysts. He noted that, in fact, center staff members are not consistently guided into broadening their perspectives by developing competence in the full range of center responsibilities and that those who do so often do not find a place to utilize fully their new abilities when they return to their parent office. He suggested that NFAC management may wish not to focus on the "total" analyst concept because it represents a threat to the present NFAC organizational structure.

Another aspect of "co-location" --space--may reinforce the center's separation from the substantive and management mainstreams of the managing office, as well as further limit the number of centers that NFAC can support. Most NFAC offices lack the free space needed to house newly--and often quickly--formed centers. But as the physical distance between the center and the managing office increases, so does the importance of careful selection of its staff--especially its chief--and the difficulty of the office's control over the center's operations. Moreover, NFAC centers can become semi-nomadic as available space fluctuates, creating inevitable but usually short-lived disruptions in production and communication.

Nevertheless, the function of the NFAC centers have also been enhanced by their autonomy and the co-location of analytic resources:

- current versus research tasks can be balanced, and in fact a viable research program can be developed and carried out while minimizing the impact of current demands on individual staff members when necessary.
- well-rounded products can be produced that combine not only the insights of several disciplines, but the exchange of positive insights among several thoughtful specialists.
- outside contacts and contract management are more manageable as each analyst has more time for broadening experiences; recent academics, in particular, are familiar with the center concept from their own campuses.
- a larger bank of common data and experience is formed than is available to the independent analysts.
- a focal point for queries and tasking by Agency management or outside consumers is established.
- over-all production efficiency is increased.

But NFAC managment bears the responsibility for regular, routine evaluation of each center and its products to ensure that the investment of personnel and physical resources continues to be justified. If the real priority issues have been targeted, their centers may well persist, or they may fruitfully evolve as the original goals are achieved or the nature of the problem shifts. When their purpose is served, centers should be allowed to "die" or be reorganized in order to free office resources. If an existing center staff is being raided regularly by managers intent on addressing other issues, a prima facie case is made for considering the dissolution of the center or reduction of its staff.

This report is Unclassified when the accompanying list of participants is removed

NFAC Analytical Centers

Center for the Analysis of Personality
and Political Behavior

Cuban Analytical Center

Development and Analysis Center

Environment and Resource Analytical Center

Iranian Analytical Center

Military Economic Analysis Center

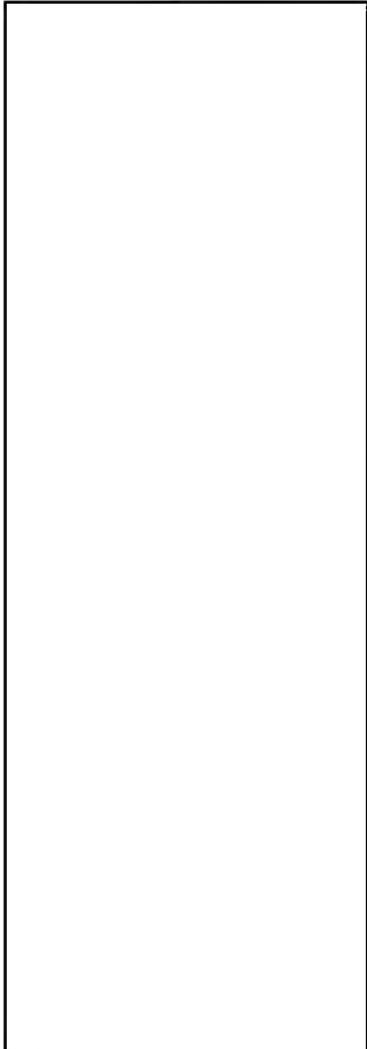
Narcotics Intelligence Analysis Center

Petroleum Supply Analysis Center

Strategic Evaluation Center

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DD/OCO
C/GITB/OTR
O/Comptroller

C/CAPPB/OSI
C/ERAC/OGCR
C/LA/OPA
CAC/OPA

DDO

CSI/OTR

GITB/OTR

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